

Literary Comparison-Contrast Essay

INTRODUCTION

Attention-getting opener

Thesis statement

BODY

Background information

Point 1: Older brother's reasons

Supporting details: Quotations

Point 1: Younger brother's reasons

Supporting details

Two Brothers, Two Ways to Live

Should you be content with what you have or should you take risks? Leo Tolstoy deals with this question in his short parable "The Two Brothers." Tolstoy shows the differences between two brothers: one who is very cautious and one who takes risks; however, of the two, Tolstoy seems to agree with the risk-taker's view.

In this parable, two brothers come across a stone with writing on it. The message says that anyone who goes into the forest, crosses the river, captures some bear cubs, and runs up a mountain without looking back will find a house where he or she will live happily ever after. In other words, a great reward is waiting for the one who will risk it all.

The older brother, who is more careful, does not want to attempt the instructions on the stone. He immediately gives five reasons why they should not follow the stone's message. He says that it might be a lie or a joke, or that they may have misunderstood its meaning. He is afraid they will get lost, will not be able to swim the river, or that they can't run up the mountain. He argues that even if all goes well, they may reach the house only to find that "the happiness awaiting us there is not at all the sort of happiness we would want." The older brother's arguments reflect many of the reasons why people do not take risks: they aren't sure what to do, are afraid of the dangers, and believe that the outcome might not be worth the effort.

The adventurous, younger brother, however, argues in favor of taking the risks. He believes that there is a reason for the message, and he is confident that he can overcome the challenges. He thinks that if they don't try it, someone else will, and they will miss out on great happiness. He also argues that nothing in life comes without taking risks and working hard. This brother is the classic risk-taker. He is confident about the outcome and unconcerned about the

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Point 2: What the older brother says

dangers.

Tolstoy also uses familiar sayings to show how the two brothers think differently about the stone's message. The older brother quotes proverbs, such as, "In seeking great happiness small pleasures may be lost," and "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." These sayings point to the older brother's desire to find contentment and happiness in his present circumstances.

Point 2: What the younger brother says

Transition words

Supporting details: Quotations

The younger brother, on the other hand, quotes sayings that encourage action and bravery. He says, "He who is afraid of the leaves must not go into the forest," and "Beneath a stone no water flows." These sayings show that the younger brother is ready to meet the challenges that come with the adventure, and he wants to try to make his life better than it already is.

Point 3: Older brother's actions

Each brother acts according to his desires. The older brother moves to a village and lives a modest lifestyle—"neither rich nor poor." The younger brother follows the instructions on the stone. At the top of the mountain, he finds a city where he is made king. After five years, he is defeated by a stronger king, loses everything, and becomes a wanderer once again. Finally, he returns to his older brother's house.

Point 3: Younger brother's actions

Point 4: Older brother's recollections

As the brothers begin to talk about their lives, the older brother declares, "I was right. Here I have lived quietly and well, while you, though you may have been king, have seen a great deal of trouble." This shows that the older brother is happy with his decision not to follow the stone's message and that he is content with what life has given him.

Point 4: Younger brother's recollections

Supporting details

The younger brother is also happy with his life. He says, "I shall always have something to remember, while you have no memories at all." He admits that although he has nothing to show for his adventures, he believes his memories alone were worth the risks.

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CONCLUSION

Restatement of thesis

Similar to his older brother, this brother is satisfied with his choice.

Tolstoy presents two ways of looking at life: the more cautious view versus the risk-taking approach. Although both views have value, the author seems to be saying that although a quiet life can be satisfying, the adventure and rewards of risk-taking are far better.